



Among the many skills we learn in life, few are more critical than the ability to read and write effectively. Literacy is at the heart of student achievement; it is a self-expression tool that allows students to access and preserve information and explore the world beyond their classroom.

Unfortunately, too many students in Massachusetts do not have access to high-quality, evidence-based, culturally responsive reading instruction and materials, leading to a literacy crisis that disproportionately impacts historically underserved students.

Policy changes coupled with greater investments in early literacy can narrow the gaps between students at the start of their academic journeys and ensure all students have the foundation they need to succeed in school and life.

Read on to learn more about the literacy crisis in MA and how it impacts underserved students.

5 Things You Need to Know

ABOUT THE LITERACY CRISIS IN MASSACHUSETTS

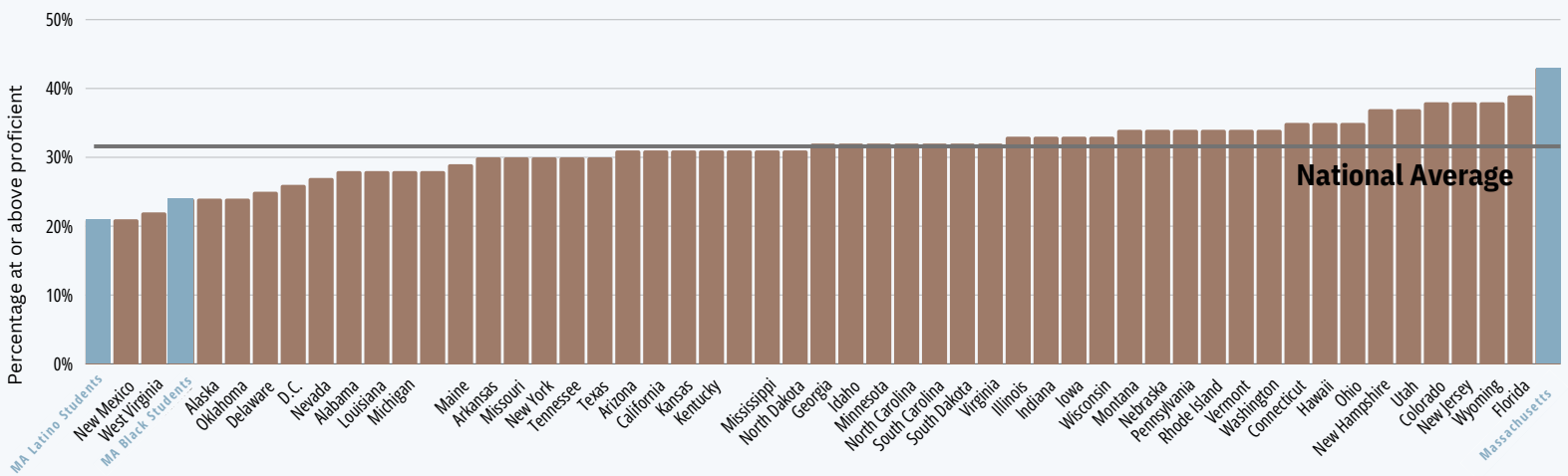
1

Despite Massachusetts' high overall ranking in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), **more than half of fourth-graders can't read proficiently.** What's more, reading proficiency rates for Black and Latino students in MA are more similar to that of the average student in the lowest-performing states.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SCORE BELOW PROFICIENT IN NAEP?

According to NAEP, students who score below proficient are unable to "integrate and interpret texts and apply their understanding of the text to draw conclusions and make evaluations."

FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE READING NAEP PROFICIENCY BY STATE, 2022



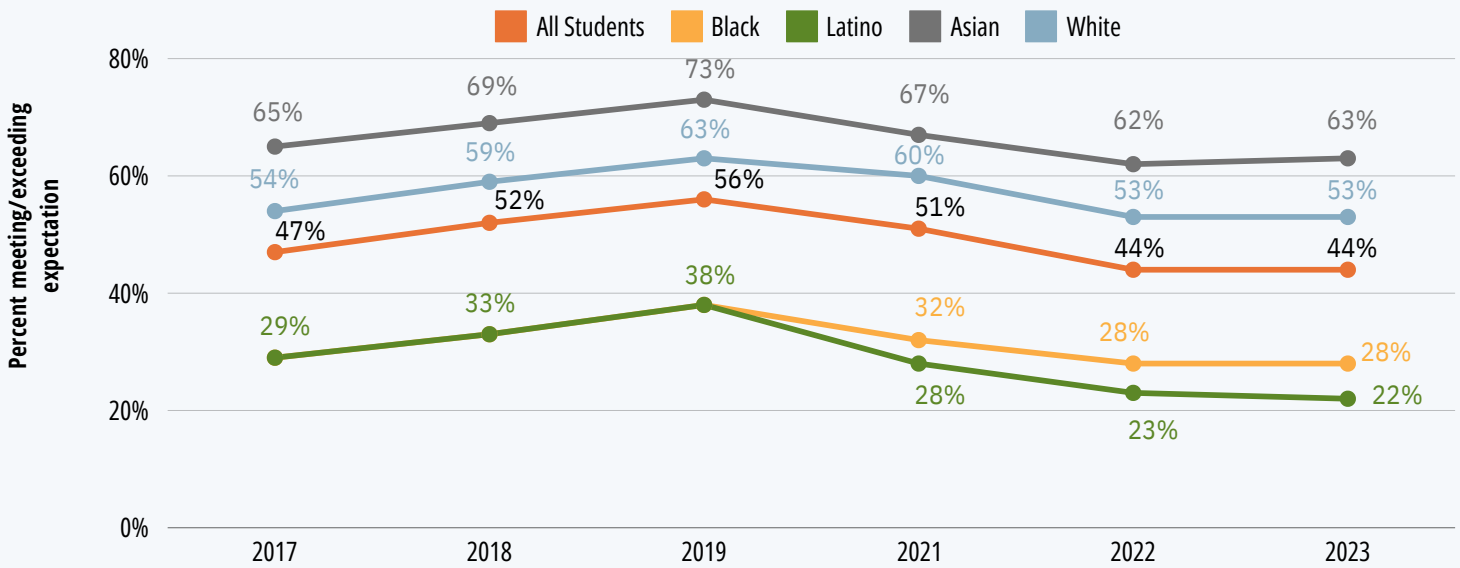
Source: The Nation's Report Card: *Ed Trust analysis of data from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)*, (accessed March 2023).



2

While more than half of students in Massachusetts are not meeting third-grade English Language Arts (ELA) benchmarks, outcomes are especially concerning for Black and Latino students, English learners, students from low-income backgrounds, and students with disabilities. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) scores show persistent gaps in literacy outcomes among student subgroups and demonstrate how deeply the pandemic has interrupted student learning.

FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF THIRD-GRADE STUDENTS MEETING AND EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS IN ELA MCAS BY SUBGROUP



Source: The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/nextgenmcas.aspx>

2023 MASSACHUSETTS LITERACY PROFICIENCY AT A GLANCE

89%

Percent of **English learners** who are NOT meeting 3rd-grade ELA MCAS benchmarks

85%

Percent of **students with disabilities** who are NOT meeting 3rd-grade ELA MCAS benchmarks

75%

Percent of **students from low-income backgrounds** who are NOT meeting 3rd-grade ELA MCAS benchmarks compared to 40% of their wealthier peers



Nearly half of Massachusetts public schools use low-quality* literacy curricula in teaching students how to read. More than 100,000 students in grades K-3 attend classes in districts using discredited literacy strategies and materials. Of these 123 districts, only 17 plan to change their curriculum this school year. Switching to a more effective curriculum can be a cost-effective lever for districts seeking to improve academic achievement.

DISTRICT LITERACY CURRICULUM AT A GLANCE

53%

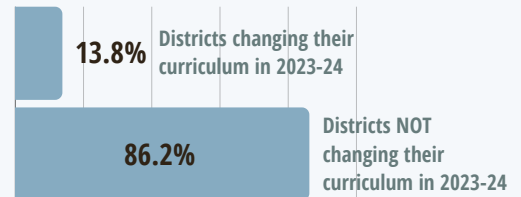


Districts using a high-quality curriculum that caters to all aspects of fundamental literacy skills

47%



Districts using a low-quality curriculum that include discredited balanced literacy strategies



In MA, 47% of districts are using a low-quality curriculum, only 13.8% plan to change their curriculum this year

Source: The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: <https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/curate/default.html> & Boston Globe: <https://apps.bostonglobe.com/metro/2023/10/literacy-education-strategies/?p1=Article Inline Text Link>

*According to the Curriculum Ratings by Teachers (CURATE), the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's curriculum evaluation tool or EdReports, a national curriculum rating system, Massachusetts defines low-quality curriculums as instructional materials that receive poor reviews.

- Meets Expectations** — Most or all evidence indicates high quality; little to none indicates low quality. Materials may not be perfect, but teachers and students would be well served and strongly supported by them.
- Partially Meets Expectations** — Some evidence indicates high quality, while some indicate low quality. Teachers would benefit from these materials but must supplement or adapt them substantively to serve their students well.
- Does Not Meet Expectations** — Little to no evidence indicates high quality; most or all evidence indicates low quality. Materials would not substantively help teachers and students meet the state's expectations for teaching and learning.
- No Rating** — Evidence is insufficient to generate a rating.

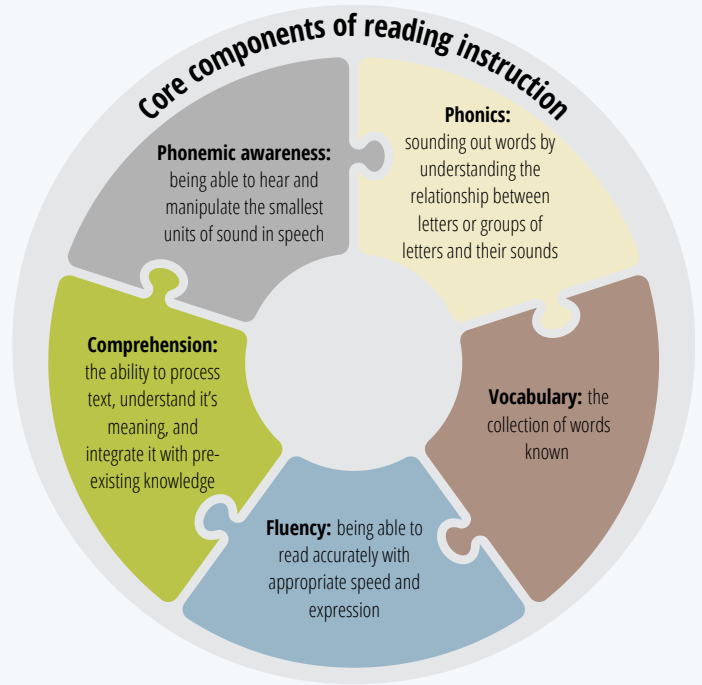
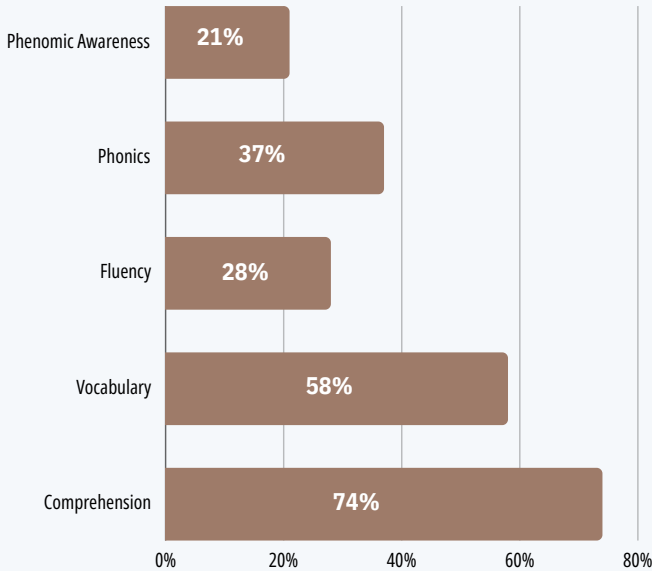
**My child is entering high school below grade level.
Once at a disadvantage, always at a disadvantage.**

- A parent that participated in the fall 2023 Mass INC Polling Group and EdTrust in MA poll

4

In Massachusetts, only 16% of teacher preparation programs adequately prepare teachers for effective reading instruction. To be effective, educators must understand how to teach all five components of scientifically based reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). Without well-trained and supported educators who know how to teach each literacy component, students in MA will continue to fall behind in reading.

FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF MASSACHUSETTS TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS ADEQUATELY ADDRESSING EACH COMPONENT OF SCIENTIFICALLY BASED READING INSTRUCTION

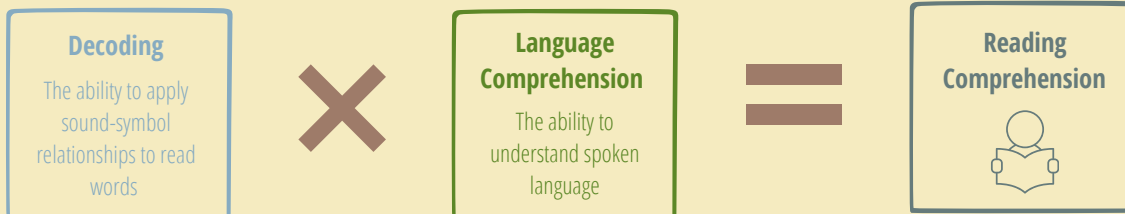


When taught together, the 5 Pillars of Literacy create the foundation for students' reading education.

Source: *The National Council on Teacher Quality*: <https://www.nctq.org/review/standard/Reading-Foundations>

WHAT IS THE SCIENCE OF READING?

"The science of reading" refers to a significant, cross-disciplinary collection of research on reading and writing conducted over the past fifty years. This research provides conclusive evidence that informs how reading and writing skills are acquired, why some individuals experience difficulty, and how we can best evaluate and teach students to improve outcomes and prevent or address reading-related challenges.



Source: Data retrieved from *The Reading League*: Data retrieved from *The National Council on Teacher Quality*: <https://www.nctq.org/review/standard/Reading-Foundations>

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In the past five years, 27 states have passed laws requiring the use of scientifically backed methods of literacy instruction. The new laws apply to 17 areas, including school curriculum, professional development for teachers, requirements for testing, and screenings for dyslexic students. Unlike many other states, **Massachusetts does not have a comprehensive literacy law in place.**

FIGURE 5: STATES MANDATING SCIENCE OF READING CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

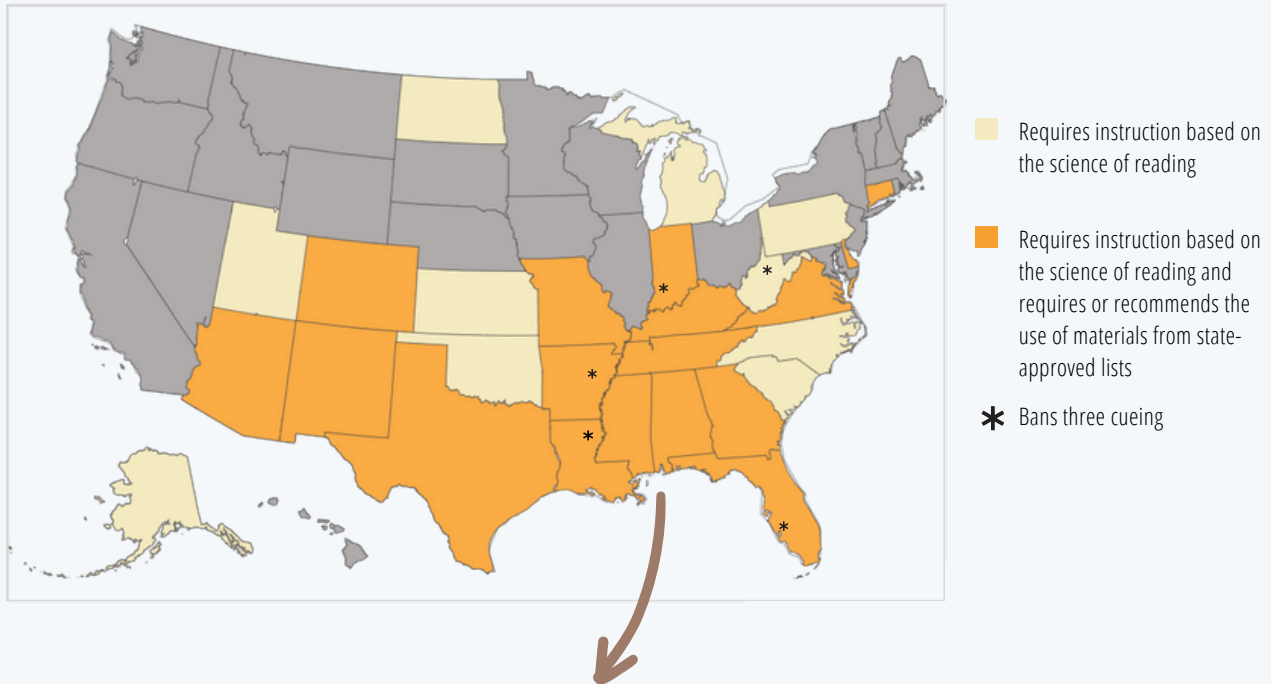
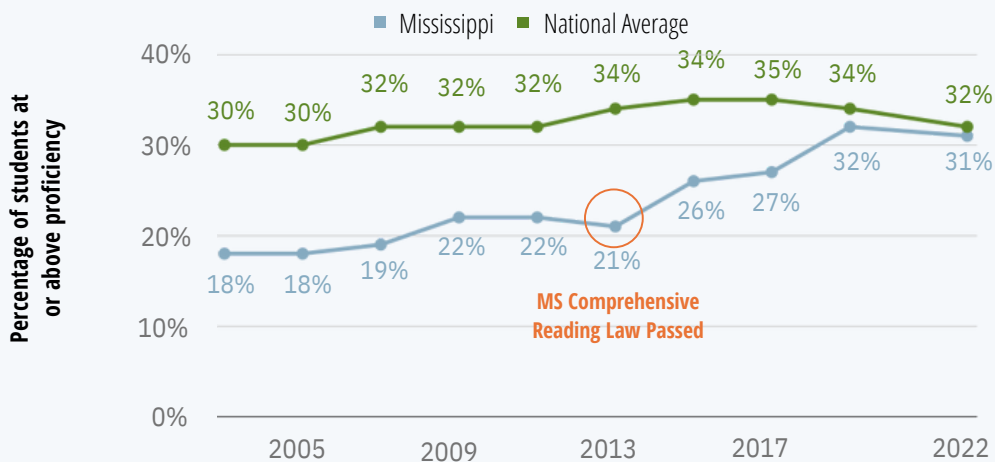


FIGURE 6: 4TH GRADE READING PROFICIENCY, MISSISSIPPI AND THE NATION



Source: FutureEd: [Data retrieved from The Reading League](https://www.futureed.org/data-retrieved-from-the-reading-league); [Data retrieved from The National Council on Teacher Quality](https://www.nctq.org/review/standard/Reading-Foundations); <https://www.nctq.org/review/standard/Reading-Foundations> and The Nation's Report Card: [Data retrieved from The Reading League](https://www.nctq.org/review/standard/Reading-Foundations); [Data retrieved from The National Council on Teacher Quality](https://www.nctq.org/review/standard/Reading-Foundations); <https://www.nctq.org/review/standard/Reading-Foundations>

In 2013, Mississippi overhauled its reading policies and subsequently soared in national test score rankings. Mississippi fourth graders went from being 49th in the nation for reading on NAEP, to 29th, and one of the reforms Mississippi embraced in 2013 was a focus on the “science of reading.”